

Lazarus and his Beloved

Kahlil Gibran

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THE CAST

Lazarus
Mary, his sister
Martha, his sister
The mother of Lazarus
Philip, a disciple
A Madman

THE SCENE

The garden outside of the home of Lazarus and his mother and sisters in Bethany

Late afternoon of Manday, the day after the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the grave.

At curtain rise: Mary is at right gazing up towards the hills. Martha is seated at her loom near the house door, left. The Madman is seated around the corner of the house, and against its wall, down left.

THE PLAY

Mary: (Turning to Martha) You do not work. You have not worked much lately.

Martha: You are not thinking of my work. My idleness makes you think of what our Master said. Oh, beloved Master!

The Madman: The day shall come when there will be no weaver, and no one to wear the cloth. We shall all stand naked in the sun.

(There is a long silence. The women do not appear to have heard The Madman speaking. They never hear him.)

Mary: It is getting late.

Martha: Yes, yes, I know. It is getting late.

(The mother enters, coming out from the house door.)

Mother: Has he not returned yet?

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Martha: No, mother, he has not returned yet.

(The three women look towards the hills.)

The Madman: He himself will never return. All that you may see is a breath struggling in a body.

Mary: It seems to me that he has not yet returned from the other world.

Mother: The death of our Master has afflicted him deeply, and during these last days he has hardly eaten a morsel, and I know at night that he does not sleep. Surely it must have been the death of our Friend.

Martha: No, mother. There is something else; something I do not understand.

Mary: Yes, yes. There is something else. I know it, too. I have known it all these days, yet I cannot explain it. His eyes are deeper. He gazes at me as though he were seeing someone else through me. He is tender but his tenderness is for someone not here. And he is silent, silent as if the seal of death is yet upon his lips.

(A silence falls over the three women.)

The Madman: Everyone looks through everyone else to see someone else.

Mother: (Breaking the silence) Would that he'd return. Of late he has spent too many hours among those hills alone. He should be here with us.

Mary: Mother, he has not been with us for a long time.

Martha: Why, he has always been with us, only those three days!

Mary: Three days? Three days! Yes, Martha, you are right. It was only three days.

Mother: I wish my son would return from the hills.

Martha: He will come soon, mother. You must not worry.

Mary: (in a strange voice) Sometimes I feel that he will never come back from the hills.

Mother: If he came back from the grave, the surely he will come back from the hills. And oh, my daughters, to think that the One who gave us back his life was slain but yesterday.

Mary: Oh the mystery of it, and the pain of it.

Mother: Oh, to think that they could be so cruel to the One who gave my son back to my heart.

(A silence)

Martha: But Lazarus should not stay so long among the hills.

Mary: It is easy for one in a dream to lose his way among the olive groves. And I know a place where Lazarus loved to sit and dream and be still. Oh, mother, it is beside a little stream. If you do not know the place you could not find it. He took me there once, and we sat on two stones, like children. It was spring, and little flowers were growing beside us. We often spoke of that place during the winter season. And each time

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that he spoke of that place a strange light came into his eyes.

The Madman: Yes, that strange light, that shadow cast by the other light.

Mary: And mother, you know that Lazarus has always been away from us, though he was always with us.

Mother: You say so many things I cannot understand. (Pause) I wish my son would come back from the hills. I wish he would come back! (Pause) I must go in now. The lentils must not be overcooked.

(The mother exits through the door)

Martha: I wish I could understand all that you say, Mary. When you speak it is as though someone else is speaking.

Mary: (Her voice a little strange) I know, my sister, I know. Whenever we speak it is someone else who is speaking.

(There is a prolonged silence. Mary is faraway in her thoughts, and Martha watches her half-curiously. Lazarus enters, coming from the hills, back left. He throws himself upon the grass under the almond trees near the house.)

Mary: (Running toward him) Oh Lazarus, you are tired and weary. You should not have walked so far.

Lazarus: (Speaking absently) Walking, walking and going nowhere; seeking and finding nothing. But it is better to be among the hills.

The Madman: Well, after all it is a cubit nearer to the other hills.

Martha: (After brief silence) But you are not well, and you leave us all day long, and we are much concerned. What you came back, Lazarus, you made us happy. But in leaving us alone here you turn our happiness into anxiety.

Lazarus: (Turning his face toward the hills) Did I leave you long this day? Strange that you should call a moment among the hills a separation. Did I truly stay more than a moment among the hills?

Martha: You have been gone all day.

Lazarus: To think, to think! A whole day among the hills! Who would believe it?

(A silence. The mother enters, coming out from the house door.)

Mother: Oh, my son, I am glad you have come back. It is late and the mist is gathering upon the hills. I feared for you my son.

The Madman: They are afraid of the mist. And the mist is their beginning and the mist is their end.

Lazarus: Yes, I have come back to you from the hills. The pity of it, the pity of it all.

Mother: What is it Lazarus? What is the pity of it all?

Lazarus: Nothing, mother. Nothing.

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Mother: You speak strangely. I do not understand you, Lazarus. You have said little since your home-coming. But whatever you have said has been strange to me.

Martha: Yes, strange.

(There is a pause.)

Mother: And now the mist is gathering here. Let us go into the house. Come, my children.

(The mother, after kissing Lazarus with wistful tenderness, enters the house.)

Martha: Yes, there is a chill in the air. I must take my loom and my linen indoors.

Mary: (sitting down beside Lazarus on the grass under the almond trees, and speaking to Martha) It is true the April evenings are not good for either your loom or your linen. Would you want me to help you take your loom indoors?

Martha: No, no. I can do it alone. I have always done it alone.

(Martha carries her loom into the house, then she returns for the linen, taking that in also. A wind passes by, shaking the almond tree, and a drift of petals falls over Mary and Lazarus.)

Lazarus: Even spring would comfort us, and even the trees would weep for us. All there is on earth, if all there is on earth could know our downfall and our grief, would pity us and weep for us.

Mary: But spring is with us, and though veiled with the veil of sorrow, yet it is spring. Let us not speak of pity. Let us rather accept both our spring and our sorrow with gratitude. And let us wonder in sweet silence at Him who gave you life yet yielded His own life. Let us not speak of pity, Lazarus.

Lazarus: Pity, pity that I should be torn away from a thousand thousand years of heart's desire, a thousand thousand years of heart's hunger. Pity that after a thousand thousand springs I am turned to this winter.

Mary: What do you mean, my brother? Why do you speak of a thousand thousand springs? You were but three days away from us. Three short days. But our sorrow was indeed longer than three days.

Lazarus: Three days? Three centuries, three aeons! All of time! All of time with the one my soul loved before time began.

The Madman: Yes, three days, three centuries, three aeons. Strange they would always weigh and measure. It is always a sundial and a pair of scales.

Mary: (In amazement) The one you soul loved before time began? Lazarus, why do you say these things? It is but a dream you dreamed in another garden. Now we are here in this garden, a stone's throw from Jerusalem. We are here. And you know well, my brother, that our Master would have you be with us in this awakening to dream of life and love; and He would have you an ardent disciple, a living witness of His glory.

Lazarus: There is no dream here and there is no awakening. You and I and this garden are but an illusion, a shadow of the real. The awakening is there where I was with my beloved and the reality.

Mary: (Rising) Your beloved?

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Lazarus: (Also rising) My beloved.

The Madman: Yes, yes. His beloved, the space virgin, the beloved of everyman.

Mary: But where is your beloved? Who is your beloved?

Lazarus: My twin heart whom I sought here and did not find. Then death, the angel with winged feet, came and led my longing to her longing, and I lived with her in the very heart of God. And I became nearer to her and she to me, and we were one. We were a sphere that shines in the sun; and we were a song among the stars. All this, Mary, all this and more, till a voice, a voice from the depths, the voice of a world called me; and that which was inseparable was torn asunder. And the thousand thousand years with my beloved in space could not guard me from the power of that voice which called me back.

Mary: (Looking unto the sky) O blessed angels of our silent hours, make me to understand this thing! I would not be an alien in this new land discovered by death. Say more, my brother, go on. I believe in my heart I can follow you.

The Madman: Follow him, if you can, little woman. Shall the turtle follow the stag?

Lazarus: I was a stream and I sought the sea where my beloved dwells, and when I reached the sea I was brought to the hills to run again among the rocks. I was a song imprisoned in silence, longing for the heart of my beloved, and when the winds of heaven released me and uttered me in that green forest I was recaptured by a voice, and I was turned again into silence. I was a root in the dark earth, and I became a flower and then a fragrance in space rising to enfold my beloved, and I was caught and gathered by hand, and I was made a root again, a root in the dark earth.

The Madman: If you are a root you can always escape the tempests in the branches. And it is good to be a running stream even after you have reached the sea. Of course it is good for water to run upward.

Mary: (To herself) Oh strange, passing strange! (To Lazarus) But my brother it is good to be a running stream, and it is not good to be a song not yet sung, and it is good to be a root in the dark earth. The Master knew all this and He called you back to us that we may know there is no veil between life and death. Do you not see how one word uttered in love may bring together elements scattered by an illusion called death? Believe and have faith, for only in faith, which is our deeper knowledge, can you find comfort.

Lazarus: Comfort! Comfort the treacherous, the deadly! Comfort that cheats our senses and makes us slaves to the passing hour! I would not have comfort. I would have passion! I would burn in the cool space with my beloved. I would be in the boundless space with my mate, my other self. O Mary, Mary, you were once my sister, and we knew one another even when our nearest kin knew us not. Now listen to me, listen to me with your heart.

Mary: I am listening, Lazarus.

The Madman: Let the whole world listen. The sky will now speak to the earth, but the earth is deaf as you and I.

Lazarus: We were in space, my beloved and I, and we were all space. We were in light and we were all light. And we roamed even like the ancient spirit that moved upon the face of the waters; and it was forever the first day. We were love itself that dwells in the heart of the white silence. Then a voice like thunder, a voice like countless spears piercing the ether, cried out saying, "Lazarus, come forth!" And the voice echoed and re-echoed in space, and I, even as a flood tide became an ebbing tide; a house divided, a garment rent, a youth

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unspent, a tower that fell down, and out of its broken stones a landmark was made. A voice cried "Lazarus, come forth!" and I descended from the mansion of the sky to a tomb within a tomb, this body in a sealed cave.

The Madman: Master of the caravan, where are your camels and where are your men? Was it the hungry earth that swallowed them? Was it the simoom that shrouded them with sand? No! Jesus of Nazareth raised His hand, Jesus of Nazareth uttered a word; and tell me now, where are your camels and where are your men, and where are your treasures? In the trackless sand, in the trackless sand. But the moon will always come again.

Mary: Oh, it is like a dream dreamt upon a mountaintop. I know, my brother, I know the world you have visited, though I have never seen it. Yet all that you say is passing strange. It is a tale told by someone across a valley, and I can hardly hear it.

Lazarus: It is all so different across the valley. There is no weight there and there is no measure. You are with your beloved.

(A silence)

Lazarus: O my beloved! O my beloved fragrance in space! Wings that were spread for me! Tell me, tell me in the stillness of my heart, do you seek me, and was it pain to you to be separated from me? Was I also a fragrance and wings spread in space? And tell me now, my beloved, was there a double cruelty, was there a brother of His in another world who called you from life to death, and had you a mother and sisters and friends who deemed it a miracle? Was there a double cruelty performed in blessedness?

Mary: No, no, my brother. There is only one Jesus of one world. All else is but a dream, even as your beloved.

Lazarus: (With great passion) No, no! If He is not a dream then He is nothing. If He had not known what is beyond Jerusalem, then He is nothing. If He did not know my beloved in space then He was not the Master. O my friend Jesus, you once gave me a cup of wine across the table, and you said, "Drink this in remembrance of me." And you dipped a morsel of bread in the oil, and you said, "Eat this, it is my share of the loaf." O my friend, you have put your arm on my shoulder and called me "son." My mother and my sisters have said in their hearts, "He loves our Lazarus." And I loved you. And then you went away to build more towers in the sky, and I went to my beloved. Tell me now, tell me, why did you bring me back? Did you not know in your knowing heart that I was with my beloved? Did you not meet her in you wandering above the summits of Lebanon? Surely you saw her image in my eyes when I came and stood before you at the door of the tomb. And have you not a beloved in the sun? And would you have a greater one than yourself separate you from her? And after separation what would you say? What shall I say to you now?

The Madman: He bade me also to come back but I did not obey, and now they call me mad.

Mary: Lazarus, Have I a beloved in the sky? Has my longing created a being beyond this world? And must I die to be with him? Oh, my brother, tell me, have I a mate also? If this thing be so, how good it is to live and die, and live and die again; if a beloved awaits me, to fulfil all that I am, and I to fulfil all that he is!

The Madman: Everywoman has a beloved in the sky. The heart of everywoman creates a being in space.

Mary: (Repeating softly as if to herself) Have I a beloved in the sky?

Lazarus: I do not know. But if you had a beloved, an other self, somewhere, sometime, and you should meet him, surely there would not be one to separate you from him.

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The Madman: He may be here, and He may call her. But like many others she may not hear.

Lazarus: (Coming to the centre of stage) To wait, to wait for each season to overcome another season; and then to wait for that season to be overcome by another; to watch all things ending before your own end comes—your end which is your beginning. To listen to all voices, and to know that they melt to silence, all save the voice of your heart that would cry even in sleep.

The Madman: The children of God married the children of men. Then they were divorced. Now, the children of men long for the children of God. I pity them all, the children of men and the children of God.

(A silence)

Martha: (Appearing in the doorway) Why don't you come into the house, Lazarus? Our mother has prepared the supper. (With a little impatience) Whenever you and Mary are together you talk and talk, and no one knows what you say.

(Martha stands for a few seconds, then goes into the house.)

Lazarus: (Speaking to himself, and as though he has not heard Martha) Oh, I am spent. I am wasted, I am hungry and I am thirsty. Would that you could give me some bread and some wine.

Mary: (Going to him and putting her arm around him) I will, I will, my brother. But come into the house. Our mother has prepared the evening meal.

The Madman: He asks for bread which they cannot bake, and wine for which they have no bottles.

Lazarus: Did I say I was hungry and thirsty? I am not hungry for your bread, nor thirsty for your wine. I tell you I shall not enter a house until my beloved's hand is upon the latch of the door. I shall not sit at the feast till she be at my side.

(Mother peers from the house door.)

Mother: Now, Lazarus, why do you stay out in the mist? And you, Mary, why do you not come into the house? I have lit the candles and the food is upon the board, and yet you will stay out babbling and chewing your words in the dark.

Lazarus: Mine own mother would have me enter a tomb. She would have me eat and drink and she would even bid me sit among shrouded faces and receive eternity from withered hands and draw life from clay cups.

The Madman: White bird that flew southward where the sun loves all things, what held you in mid-air, and who brought you back? It was your friend, Jesus of Nazareth. He brought you back out of pity for the wingless who would not be alone. Oh, white bird, it is cold here, and you shiver and the North wind laughs in your feathers.

Lazarus: You would be in a house and under a roof. You would be within four walls, with a door and a window. You would be here, and you are without vision. Your mind is here, and my spirit is there. All of you is upon the earth; all of me is in space. You creep into houses, and I flew beyond upon the mountaintop. You are all slaves, the one to the other, and you worship but yourselves. You sleep and you dream not; you wake but you walk not among the hills. And yesterday I was weary of you and of lives, and I sought the other world which you call death, and if I had died it was out of longing. Now, I stand here at this moment, rebelling against that which you call life.

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Martha: (Who has come out of the house while Lazarus was speaking) But the Master saw our sorrow and our pain, and He called you back to us, and yet you rebel. Oh, what cloth, rebelling against its own weaver! What a house rebelling against its own builder!

Mary: He knew our hearts and He was gracious unto us, and when He met our mother and saw in her eyes a dead son, buried, then her sorrow held Him, and for a moment He was still, and He was silent. (Pause) Then we followed Him to your tomb.

Lazarus: Yes, it was my mother's sorrow, and your sorrow. It was pity, self-pity, that brought me back. How selfish is self-pity, and how deep. I say that I rebel. I say that divinity itself should not turn spring to winter. I had climbed the hills in longing, and your sorrow brought me back to this valley. You wanted a son and a brother to be with you through life. Your neighbours wanted a miracle. You and your neighbours, like your fathers and your forefathers, would have a miracle, that you may believe in the simplest things in life. How cruel you are and how hard are your hearts, and how dark is the night of your eyes. For that you bring down the prophets from their glory to you joys, and then you kill the prophets.

Martha: (with reproof) You call our sorrow self-pity. What is your wailing but self-pity? Be quiet, and accept the life the Master has given you.

Lazarus: He did not give me life, He gave you my life. He took my life from my own beloved, and gave it to you, a miracle to open your eyes and your ears. He sacrificed me even as He sacrificed Himself. (Speaking unto the sky) Father, forgive them. They know not what they do.

Mary: (In awe) It was He who said those very words, hanging upon the cross.

Lazarus: Yes, He said these words for me as for Himself, and for all the unknown who understand and are not understood. Did He not say these words when your tears begged Him for my life? It was your desire and not His will that bade His spirit to stand at the sealed door and urge eternity to yield me unto you. It was the ancient longing for a son and a brother that brought me back.

Mother: (Approaches him and puts her arm around his shoulders) Lazarus, you were ever an obedient son and a loving son. What has happened to you? Be with us, and forget all that troubles you.

Lazarus: (Raising his hand) My mother and my brothers and my sisters are those who hear my words.

Mary: These are also His words.

Lazarus: Yes, and He said these words for me as well as for Himself, and for all those who have earth for mother, and sky for father, and for all those who are born free of a people and a country and a race.

The Madman: Captain of my ship, the wind filled your sails, and you dared the sea; and you sought the blessed isles. What other wind changed your course, and why did you return to these shores? It was Jesus of Nazareth who commanded the wind with a breath of His own breath, and then filled the sail where it was empty, and emptied it where it was full.

Lazarus: (Suddenly he forgets them all, and he raises his head, and opens his arms.) O my beloved! There was dawn in your eyes, and in that dawn there was the silent mystery of a deep night, and the silent promise of a full day, and I was fulfilled, and I was whole. O my beloved, this life, this veil, is between us now. Must I live this death and die again that I may live again? Must needs linger until all these green things turn yellow and then naked again, and yet again? (Pause) Oh, I cannot curse Him. But why, of all men, why should I return? Why should I of all shepherds be driven back into the desert after the green pasture?

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The Madman: If you were one of those who would curse, you would not have died so young.

Lazarus: Jesus of Nazareth, tell me now, why did you do this to me? Was it fair that I should be laid down, a humble lowly sorrowful stone leading to the height of your glory? Any one of the dead might have served to glorify you. Why have you separated this lover from his beloved? Why did you call me to a world which you knew in your heart you would leave? (Then crying with a great voice) Why—why— why did you call me from the living heart of eternity to this living death? O Jesus of Nazareth—I cannot curse you! I cannot curse you. I would bless you. (Silence. Lazarus becomes as one whose strength has gone out in a stream. His head falls forward almost upon his breast. After a moment of awful silence, he raises his head again, and with a transfigured face he cries in a deep and thrilling voice.) Jesus of Nazareth! My friend! We have both been crucified. Forgive me! Forgive me. I bless you—now, and forevermore.

(At this moment the disciple appears running from the direction of the hills.)

Mary: Philip!

Philip: He is risen! The Master is risen from the dead and now He is gone to Galilee.

The Madman: He is risen, but He will be crucified again a thousand times.

Mary: Philip, my friend, what do you say?

Martha: (Rushes toward the disciple, and grasps him by the arms) How glad I am to see you again. But who has risen? Of whom are you speaking?

Mother: (Walking toward him) Come in, my son. You shall have supper with us tonight.

Philip: (Unmoved by any of their words) I say the Master has risen from the dead and has gone into Galilee.

(A deep silence falls.)

Lazarus: Now you shall all listen to me. If He has risen from the dead they will crucify Him again, but they shall not crucify Him alone. Now I shall proclaim Him, and they shall crucify me also.

(He turns in exaltation and walk in the direction of the hills.)

Lazarus: My mother and my sisters, I shall follow Him who gave me life until He gives me death. Yes, I too would be crucified, and that crucifixion will end this crucifixion.

(A silence)

Lazarus: Now I shall seek His spirit, and I shall be released. And though they bind me in iron chains I shall not be bound. And though a thousand mothers and a thousand thousand sisters shall hold my garments I shall not be held. I shall go with the East wind where the East wind goes. And I shall seek my beloved in the sunset where all our days find peace. And I shall seek my beloved in the night where all the mornings sleep. And I shall be the one man among all men who twice suffered life, and twice death, and twice knew eternity.

(Lazarus looks into the face of his mother, then into the faces of his sisters, then at Philip's face; then again at his mother's face. Then as if he were a sleepwalker he turns and runs toward the hills. He disappears. They are all dazed and shaken.)

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Mother: My son, my son, come back to me!

Mary: My brother, where are you going? Oh come, my brother, come back to us.

Martha: (As if to herself) It is so dark I know that he will lose his way.

Mother: (Almost screaming) Lazurus, my son!

(A silence)

Philip: He has gone where we all shall go. And he shall not return.

Mother: (Going to the very back of the stage, close to where he has disappeared) Lazarus, Lazarus, my son! Come back to me! (She shrieks.)

(There is a silence. The running steps of Lazarus are lost in the distance.)

The Madman: Now he is gone, and he is beyond your reach. And now your sorrow must seek another. (He pauses) Poor, poor Lazarus, the first of the martyrs, and the greatest of them all.